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Author of "The Nibelung's Ring."


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BEHIND the obvious and sensuous aim in every true work of art, lies an aim which is universal and ideal. This truth Plotinus affirmed, perhaps for the first time in literature, when he said that "the arts do not simply imitate what is apparent to the senses, but recur to the principles from which nature itself proceeds." Now the principles from which nature proceeds are, primarily, Ideas—the thoughts in the Mind of God, or the Intelligible World, as philosophers have termed it. The creative Soul, which is God in another aspect, beholding the Ideas in the Divine Mind, and receiving them into itself as productive principles, manifests them, and itself in them, externally, through its generative power which is known as nature; and this manifestation, the "externization of the soul," as Emerson calls it, is the sensible universe. The creation of the universe is in no wise an act of will, but an essential act of the soul, whose nature is to create. And this essential creation is the most perfect, inasmuch as the created thing, emanating wholly from the creative essence, is of necessity a very image or reflection of the creator on a lower plane.

But the need to create is not alone a property of universal soul; in every individual soul this need exists, since every individual soul is partially what the Great Soul is totally, and contains as productive principle in its own essence every Idea which subsists as productive principle in the universal soul. All souls create, or manifest

themselves externally, in some kind. The artist-soul creates in looking to the Idea of Beauty, and to other ideas through this ; for in every idea all the others are co-existent. But the artist, being but an individual, does not possess in activity universal powers, and is therefore compelled to seek without for the means of his self-manifestation. Yet in the work of art, that miniature world which the artist creates, the only thing that greatly counts is the sign of essential creation, the indefinable something which came not from the will, but was imparted to the work as if unconsciously and inevitably ; which does not exist for whoso understand it not, but is recognised by those of kindred soul with the artist. For this is indeed the image of the soul, the direct manifestation of the idea which it is the final aim of art to reveal.

There is a theory, widely prevalent, at least among artists, at the present day, which is expressed in the formula, "Art for Art's sake." Those who hold this theory maintain that art is totally unconnected with religion or morality ; that it is itself its own justification, and exists for no other purpose than its own perfection. In opposition to this theory it might be urged that, since art is a natural instinct of the human soul, it cannot be wholly foreign to, or untouched by, any other natural instinct of the soul ; that, the soul being one in essence, the various faculties by which it makes manifest its infinitude of power, are necessarily one in origin. Moreover, as Goodness, Truth, and Beauty are but the triple manifestation of the one divine Essence which is at the root of all things ; so morality, which strives for the good ; religion, which seeks the true ; and art, which aims at the beautiful, are but various aspects of the soul's single aspiration towards that divine Essence which is at once

its source and its goal. A distinguished thinker and scholar of modern times—Victor Cousin—has finely said that "the character of art is to address itself to what is most noble in us, and to awaken the powerful, but latent, sympathies of the soul with truth by the intermediary of beauty, employed as a form of truth itself."* Or perhaps we may summarize the theory to which I am now referring, by saying that as the enlightened soul may detect in every sensible sight and sound symbols of the Divine Nature from which they originate, the especial business of art, expressing itself by sensible sights or sounds, is to reveal the God in the symbol.

If art seem at times to aim at something less than this, it is because it is misunderstood. Its true aim may be overlaid with a false and illusory aim. The artist's conscious purpose may be comparatively ignoble; but, even thus, if he be indeed an artist, his unconscious purpose — his *essential* work in the act of creation—will be such as I have indicated. We must, of course, distinguish between the true work of art, and that which has only the trappings—the external show—of art, without the inward reality. Not every combination of musical sounds is to be called music, any more than every combination of words is to be called literature. But in every true work of art there is more meaning, by far, than its author ever intended. The fine gold may be alloyed with baser metal, but, so far as it is true art, so far as it is truly beautiful, it is a revelation of the Infinite—the very God made manifest in the symbol.

The view that art exists, not for art's sake, but for the soul's sake, was held by Wagner, as it has been held, I believe, by the very greatest artists in all times. It is essentially the view which that great

* *Œuvres de Platon*, vol. iii., pp. 139-140.

artist in words, Plato, has expressed in his noble definition of music: "the movement of sound so as to reach the soul for its education in virtue." By Wagner not only has this view been practically exemplified in all his great works of dramatic-musical art, but in his published writings passages may be found which make his position in this matter quite unmistakeable. I will quote only a few sentences from his *Religion and Art*, an essay written towards the close of his life, and expressive of his most mature convictions. "Art," he says, "has then first fulfilled her true mission, when by ideal presentation of the allegorical form she has led to the comprehension of the inner kernel itself, the ineffably divine truth." Again: "As I arrived at the conviction that true art can prosper only on the basis of true morality, I had cause to acknowledge in the former a vocation so much the higher as I found it to be completely one with true religion." And once more: after quoting the following sentences from Schopenhauer—"Complete satisfaction, the true realization of our desires, ever present themselves to us only in the picture, in the work of art, in poetry, in music. Surely from this one might derive the assurance that they must be actually existent somewhere"—Wagner continues: "That which here, as fitted into a severely philosophical system, might appear utterable but with an almost sceptical smile, could with us very well become a starting-point for deeply earnest conclusions. The finished parable of the noblest work of art should, by its purifying influence on the mind, point us very clearly the way to find the paradigm, whose 'somewhere' must necessarily reveal itself only to our inward being, freed from time and space, and filled with love, faith, and hope. Yet the power of the highest art cannot avail for such a revelation if it lack a basis

for its religious symbolism in a perfect moral order of the world, through which alone it can become truly intelligible to the people. Only by taking from the actual practice of life its parable of the Divine, can the work of art bring home this parable to life again, for purest contentment and redemption beyond life."

It is the teaching of Plotinus that the soul can perceive beauty only in so far as it is itself beautiful. Wagner, therefore, was in complete accord with the great master of philosophy when he insisted that the beautiful in art must necessarily spring from the beautiful in life, and that its nobility can be rightly appreciated only by virtue of a corresponding nobility in the auditors or spectators. I believe that no artist ever had a clearer sense than Wagner of the divine import of the message which he was inspired to deliver. As he gradually realized the true nature of his wonderful gift, he realized also the responsibility which such a gift must bear with it. To him, his art was a sacred thing, and, even in years of poverty and distress, he never allowed himself to use it to other than the highest purposes.

Wagner's theories upon art, his reform of the musical drama, arose from the necessities of the inward impulse to which his works owed their existence. His dramas were by no means constructed in accordance with pre-conceived theories; rather did his theories assume definite shape in the course of his creative work. He possessed to the full the true artist's intuition, of which he says: "With an artist, the shape-giving and representing impulse is, of its nature, entirely instinctive and unconscious; even where he requires reflection in order to mature the type of his intuition into an objective work of art, the definite choice of his means of expression will not

so much be determined by conscious thought as by that spontaneous intuition which constitutes the character of his individual genius."* In Wagner's music direct inspiration is as evident as in Mozart's. Only, with Mozart the inspiration acted upon a nature childlike, charming, rich in emotion, but not in thought; while with Wagner it acted upon a nature deeply emotional, but also deeply thoughtful; a nature in which the intense sensibility of the artist was wedded to the profound insight of the philosopher.

The double direction of Wagner's genius, as dramatic poet and musician, prescribed the means which he was to adopt in rendering his message to the world. His music-dramas have, upon the whole, a closer relation to the ancient Athenian tragedy than to any more recent form of the dramatic art. Least of all have they any essential kinship with the modern opera. This is true of the opera before Wagner's time, and, I am afraid, it is hardly less true of the opera since his time. Wagner's reform of the musical drama, in its deepest import, began and ended with his own works. He himself says: "To reach the Ideal had been the business of the individual genius; what survives the work of genius is only the knack of acquired aptitude."† So it has been in Wagner's case. The numerous technical improvements which he originated have been eagerly adopted by later composers of opera, but the noble aim, the devotion to a sacred ideal, were his alone. An artist once said to me: "Here is a man who has brought fire from heaven, and these fellows are using it to light their farthing rush-lights!"

The modern opera is a hybrid production, in

* *The Music of the Future*, translated by Dannreuther, p. 8.

† *Religion and Art.*

which music, sometimes of a very high class, is joined with verse which has but rarely the smallest claim to the title of poetry, and with dramatic action which is always subordinate to the music. It is true that since Wagner wrote, and in consequence of his example, dramatic unity has been more regarded, and a closer connection established between the music and the action. But this reformation, though desirable, is purely superficial, affecting the form alone, and not the purpose. The purpose of the opera, as a whole, remains what it has always been—to provide an evening's entertainment by appealing to the senses and emotions of thoughtless persons. And if the music sometimes rises above this not very exalted aim, it does so by its own inherent nobility, and is not helped, but hampered, by its associations.

No ideal work of art could be looked for under such conditions. In France alone, during the eighteenth century, a serious attempt was made to lift the opera to a higher level. But the attempt was only partially successful. The sculpturesque music of Glück, always noble, and sometimes reaching great heights of dramatic power and pathos, was but ill matched with the feeble pseudo-classicism of his text. Moreover, the composer was still bound by musical conventions, which prohibited the employment of any large, all-embracing, musical-dramatic form. The problem was not yet solved. The works of Glück constitute, outside Wagner, the noblest achievement of operatic art down to the present day; but they scarcely constitute so much as an attempt to attain the conditions under which the ideal work of art in this kind could alone become possible—the true co-ordination of words, action, and music, worthy each of the other, and working together in mutual helpfulness under the dominance of a great idea.

But before we enter upon a more detailed consideration of Wagner's art-work, it will be well to recall, very briefly, certain facts of his early career which may help to throw light upon the character and tendency of his genius. He showed early signs of exceptional intellectual activity. As a boy, he was familiar with the writings of Homer and Shakespeare, and by the age of fourteen he had translated into German various passages from Shakespeare's plays, as well as a large portion of the Odyssey, and had written a play of his own, in imitation of Shakespeare. His musical development was slow ; as, indeed, could hardly fail to be the case with a genius of such singular and profound originality. The master whose compositions chiefly impressed Wagner in his early youth was Carl Maria von Weber, the representative in music of the romantic sentiment with which German literature at that time was so strongly imbued. Somewhat later he became acquainted with the works of Beethoven, who remained, throughout his life, the object of his enthusiastic admiration.

At a yet later date he went to reside in Paris, and was there, for a while, dazzled by the sensuous splendours of the Grand Opera, then illuminated by the brilliant, if shallow, genius of such composers as Auber and Meyerbeer. Under this influence he wrote his opera *Rienzi*, the first of his works to gain for him a success, in the worldly sense of the term. He was twenty-five years of age when—in 1838—he commenced the composition of this work ; it was produced, with applause, at Dresden in the autumn of 1842. *Rienzi* certainly possesses such merits as are compatible with opera of the class to which it belongs. It contains much gorgeous spectacle, dramatic situations, and an abundance of effective and agreeable music with occasional passages of real power and beauty.

But it gives us no foretaste whatever of the true art-work to which the future life of the composer was to be devoted. In writing the text, which was based upon the well-known novel by Bulwer-Lytton, Wagner himself says: "I was simply thinking of an opera-text which would enable me to display the principal forms of 'Grand Opera,' such as introductions, finales, choruses, arias, duets, trios, etc., with all possible splendour."

Between *Rienzi* and the work which immediately succeeded it, there lies an abyss. *The Flying Dutchman* is the first important work of Wagner's in which we may clearly recognise that influx from the universal soul into the individual which we term inspiration. He had found his ideal, though the expression was, naturally, as yet imperfect. The dominant idea in the *Flying Dutchman* is the redeeming power of love — of love in the most sacred, most universal, sense. This idea—the basis of all true religion—lay from henceforth at the very heart of Wagner's artistic activity. He had broken for ever with the conventional opera. His art, for the future, was to be employed, not to amuse, but to exalt. With the inspiration came the perception that the source of art lies deep in the divine cause of the universe, and that its true purpose is to reveal that cause in its aspect of the Beautiful; to elevate the mind by the symbolism of sensible beauty to that beauty which is beyond symbol and beyond sense; or, in his own words, "to raise people from the vulgar interests of daily life, to enable them to comprehend and to adore the highest and the most significantly beautiful that the human mind can grasp."

His studies in Greek literature came now to his aid. "History," he says, "presented to me a type for the ideal relation of the theatre, such as I imagined it, to public life. This was the

theatre of ancient Athens, which was only opened on days of special festivity, when the enjoyment of art was at the same time a religious celebration, in which the most distinguished men of the state took part as poets or actors, appearing like priests before the assembled populations of town and country, who were filled with such high expectations of the loftiness of the works to be performed, that Æschylus and Sophocles could produce before them the profoundest of all poems, and be certain of their appreciation."*

Following the example of the Greek tragedians, Wagner now turned to the field of mythical legend for the formal subjects of his musical dramas. It was a true instinct which led him to recognise in mythology the material most suitable for his purpose. Those legends which have sprung from the heart of the people, no one knows how or when, are of manifold significance and of inexhaustible vitality. They deal with motives and conceptions which are common to all mankind, and are found, substantially the same, though varying in form, in nations the most widely remote. Dealing thus with what is universal in humanity, they are peculiarly suited for musical illustration, whereas music in itself deals essentially and directly with universal ideas, and only by virtue of external associations with particular or partial conceptions. The Flying Dutchman of the Northern legend which Wagner adopted, is, as the poet himself has pointed out, no other than the wandering Ulysses of the Odyssey, in Teutonic garb. But beyond this, he is the soul of man, tossed hither and thither upon the troubled sea of generation, and awaiting his release from the cycle of re-births. The release comes at last, as it must always come, through the purifying power of love. Senta, the heroine, is again the soul, but in a

* *Music of the Future*, p. 18.

higher aspect; she stands for love itself, the love which renounces the world in order to save the world. And note also, that it is only when the man-soul raises itself to the height of the woman-soul; when he, for love's sake, renounces even love itself, that the act of redemption is accomplished. This conception of love, all-renouncing, all-redeeming, was the great truth which Wagner set himself to illustrate with gradually increasing power of artistic expression.

The ideal theatre of Wagner's contemplation was in no respect a mere resuscitation of the theatre of the ancient Athenians. His drama was akin to theirs in nobility of treatment and loftiness of purpose; it resembled theirs in the mythological nature of its subject-matter, although his subjects were always drawn from the legends of one or another branch of the Teutonic race to which he belonged. But he employed all the resources of modern art in order to render his representations more beautiful, more impressive, and thus, as he hoped, more convincingly illustrative of the idea which lay at the back of this magnificent symbolism. He thought by combining the arts of poetry, of music, and of painting—the last term implying the whole effect of the scene as it presents itself to the eye—to create an impression more powerful than would be possible to any one of them when isolated. I cannot think that he was mistaken; at the same time it must be owned that when so much depends upon the perfection of the means employed, an entirely adequate performance of any of his dramas must always be difficult of attainment. Doubtless, the natural yearning of the artist for beauty of sight and sound was largely responsible for Wagner's use of these elaborate resources; nevertheless, it must not be forgotten that all was directed towards the more complete and accurate rendering of the message

which he had to deliver. I believe it is hardly too much to say, that in some of his later and most perfect dramas, there is scarcely a stage-direction, however minute, which has not its symbolic, as well as dramatic, significance.

In one respect, especially, the development of art in modern times gave to Wagner a means of expression such as had never before been known to the stage. I am alluding, of course, to the art of music, which had already been carried to the highest point it has yet attained as an independent art, in the symphonies of Beethoven. Every form of art is a mode of the soul's self-explication ; a language, so to speak, which is untranslatable, in regard to its special characteristic, into the terms of any other language. For this, indeed, is the *raison d'être* of every art, as such : that it make manifest to us some particular aspect of the idea which cannot be manifested, or, at least, cannot be manifested with equal fulness and intensity, by any other art. Wagner, therefore, in order to manifest his idea as completely as might be possible to sensible representation, added to the arts of poetry and dramatic action that of music, the subtlest and most universal medium of the intuition, that by its means a further and yet more intimate degree of insight might be afforded.

The function of the orchestra in his music-dramas is to some extent, as he himself has explained, similar to that of the Greek chorus. In the ancient theatre the chorus, standing apart from the action of the piece, supplied a kind of commentary on that action, and on the motives which brought it about. To use Schlegel's words, it was " a personified reflection on the action which was going on ; the incorporation into the representation itself of the sentiments of the poet, as the spokesman of the whole human race."* This function of commenting and reflecting

* *Lectures on Dramatic Literature* (Bohn's edition), *p.* 69.

Wagner has transferred to the orchestra, with manifest advantage. In the first place, the musical commentary is continuous; it supplements and elucidates the action without ever disturbing or interrupting it. In the second place, the addition to the spoken drama of the resources of another art opens out an entirely new range of expression and interpretation. Music, especially when its aim is determined by a definite poetic subject, has an incomparably subtle power of revealing every variety of character and every shade of emotion. But beyond this, by imparting its own universality to the conceptions defined in the spoken and acted drama, it raises them continually above the personality implied in speech and gesture, yet without abandoning the definiteness of purpose originally prescribed to it by the poet; so that at every moment we are sensible of the truly symbolic character of the representation. Thus, to give an example, while the spoken drama sets before us the love-story of Tristan and Isolde, the music, reflecting faithfully the motives supplied by the poet, carries us at the same time beyond the sphere of personality, and speaks in clearest tones to our intuition of the love, the sorrow, the exaltation, of humanity itself, whereof Tristan and Isolde and the rest of the *dramatis personæ* are but symbols.

Wagner's way of applying music to the drama was certainly unprecedented. It has been imitated in some respects, but, as you remember, Ulysses' bow could be bent by none but Ulysses. The structural reforms which he effected in dramatic music may be broadly comprised under two heads: firstly, the substitution for a series of detached forms, of purely musical import, of one great, all-embracing musical form, co-ordinate with, and inseparable from, the poetic form of the drama; and secondly, the systematic employment of *leit-motive*, or representative

melodies. These reforms, which arose, as I said before, entirely from the necessities of the inward and poetic impulse, are already indicated in the *Flying Dutchman*, but they are by no means fully developed in that work, nor in the two music-dramas which succeeded it—*Tannhäuser* and *Lohengrin*. Through these works, full of exquisite beauties as they are, the poet-composer was but gradually feeling his way towards that absolute mastery of the means, that marvellous artistic unity, which distinguish his later dramas—the colossal *Nibelung's Ring*, *Tristan and Isolde*, *Parsifal*, and, in a lighter vein, but, in its way, not less perfect, the *Meistersinger von Nürnberg*.

In these later and most consummate productions of his genius, the *leit-motive*, to which I referred, constitute practically the entire basis of the musical structure. Each *leit-motiv* is a melody, or melodic phrase, which represents the musical aspect of some thought or emotion or characteristic feature, whether of person or of thing, which has a distinct part to play in the dramatic development of the idea. The first, and most obvious, advantage gained by the employment of *leit-motive* consists in the fact that it places at the poet's disposal the immense power of association. By this means the music is enabled to indicate with absolute clearness not merely emotions, but thoughts and motives. For example, if the actors are speaking on any subject whatever, and the poet wishes to suggest that some thought or motive, unexpressed in the words, is actually at work, he has but to introduce into the music the *leit-motiv* associated with that thought or motive, and the audience becomes at once aware of that which lies behind the spoken words. The meaning of each *leit-motiv* is usually determined by the circumstances of its first introduction into the drama. In the

musical development, however, the *leit-motive* are not only interwoven with one another, but are themselves often varied (though always, of course, recognisable) in accordance with the varying aspects of the thoughts or characters which they are intended to suggest. For besides this power of association, there is a deeper significance in Wagner's employment of the *leit-motiv*. An entirely trivial melody may at times awaken deep thought or emotion by the mere force of association. But this is not art. The *leit-motiv* must not be an arbitrary sign, however beautiful; it must convey some real expression in musical sound of the nature of the thing typified. It must possess, in fact, a certain suggestion of inevitableness. There is a passage in one of Emerson's essays which seems to me to illustrate the significance of Wagner's *leit-motive*. "Like the metamorphosis of things into higher organic forms is their change into melodies. Over everything stands its dæmon or soul, and, as the form of the thing is reflected by the eye, so the soul of the thing is reflected by a melody. The sea, the mountain-ridge, Niagara, and every flower-bed, pre-exist, or super-exist, in pre-cantations, which sail like odours in the air, and when any man goes by with an ear sufficiently fine, he overhears them, and endeavours to write down the notes without diluting or depraving them."*

I believe that everyone who has entered deeply into the spirit of Wagner's music-dramas, will admit that the composer has indeed caught some reflection in sound of these super-sensuous melodies. We wonder sometimes how it is that the character or the thought, no less than the emotion, is made so clear to us by the musical treatment. And the answer is, that the melody *is* the character, the thought, expressing itself in terms of musical sound.

* Essays, second series: *The Poet.*

And thus in the interweaving and development of these melodies, which constitute the musical structure of Wagner's dramas, we have a very picture of life ; or we might even say, life itself reflected in music. It is obvious that such translation of thought into sound implies a power in the composer transcending by infinite degrees any power of talent, however superlative. This, beyond question, is the power of genius, of inspiration in the strictest sense ; lifting, as it were, for a moment the veil which hides from us the true unity of life, and revealing, if but by hints, the secrets of that high region in which Thought and Being are one.

It must always be felt, by those who have formed any true conception of the nature of Wagner's art-work, that to divorce, in any of his dramas, the music from the words, or, conversely, the words from the music, would be to misunderstand the whole purpose of the poet. We must grant that both words and music, even when thus isolated, are capable of producing a profound impression. Of language, especially in his later works, Wagner showed himself undeniably a master ; while instances are many of hearers who have been moved to downright enthusiasm by the mere power of the music. But thus to divide what is in itself an artistic whole, can have but one result — that of rendering us unable to do justice either to the genius or to the aim of the master. Taking the words alone, we may obtain a clear knowledge of the dramatic development of the idea, and may discern much of the inner significance of the drama, but we lose not only the rich musical development, but also many of the subtle shades of meaning which are indicated or elucidated by the music. If we confine our attention to the music (by far the commoner error), we are perhaps in a still worse case ; for although we may be deeply conscious of the inspiration

which, like a breath from the Infinite, pervades the whole musical setting, the poet's purpose, defined by the words, remains unknown to us, and, from our lack of this knowledge, we miss the half of what the music itself is meant to convey to us, and, in association with the words, does clearly convey. A Russian composer of much present celebrity—Tschaïkovsky—has said that "Wagner has transferred the centre of gravity from the stage to the orchestra." This statement is, of course, precisely the reverse of the truth, but it indicates accurately, and, I suppose, will always indicate, the point of view of the mere musician towards Wagner's works. The truth, briefly stated, is that words, music and action are the constituent parts of that artistic whole which Wagner designated the music-drama. Each part without its fellows is incomplete. To each is assigned the function of strengthening and assisting the others by revealing that aspect of the subject which its nature fits it best to reveal. And by the strict co-ordination of these parts, and their subordination to the central idea, the spiritual truth which is developed by their various symbolism, is assured the unity of the entire music-drama as a work of art.

To give a description of Wagner's music-dramas posterior to the *Flying Dutchman* would be impossible within the limits of a single lecture, but I will venture to offer a few remarks upon each of them, taking them in the order in which they were written; remarks, however, which will have more frequent reference to their spiritual contents than to their æsthetic form. The first of these dramas was *Tannhäuser*. Here again we have a suggestion of the wanderings of Ulysses, in those of the minstrel-knight; and the abode of Tannhäuser in the Hill of Venus has the same significance as that of Ulysses in the island of Circe—the sub-

jugation of the human soul by the allurements of sensual pleasure. In both cases the soul retains so much of its proper manliness as to chafe at its enslavement, and in the end to break away from the enchantress. The essential subject of *Tannhäuser*, as of the *Flying Dutchman*, is the redemption of the sinful soul by the power of love divine. The old German legend, from which the story is taken, is probably familiar to you in the beautiful poetic versions of it by Swinburne and William Morris. But the end of all, which Swinburne and perhaps even Morris have left vague, is completed by Wagner with perfect assurance. Love cannot fail; and how then shall the sinner perish in his sin?

Next to *Tannhäuser*, and marking, upon the whole, a distinct advance in artistic expression, came *Lohengrin*, the first of Wagner's dramas of which the story was based upon the mediæval legends of the Holy Grail. To these legends the poet recurred, many years later, for the subject of his last work, *Parsifal*. The Holy Grail, in Christian tradition, was the dish or cup which Jesus used at the last supper with his disciples, and in which Joseph of Arimathæa received his blood as he hung upon the cross. With Wagner, as in the old romances, it typifies the fountain of spiritual life, the divine love which quickens and redeems the world. Even in later works of the master we shall scarcely find a more beautiful and expressive piece of musical symbolism than the prelude to *Lohengrin*, which depicts the descent from heaven of angels bearing the sacred vessel, and their re-ascent, leaving to man this pledge of eternal life. Elsa, the heroine, is a type of the human soul, who, in her distress, is succoured by Lohengrin, the messenger of the Grail. With him she is united in marriage, on the condition that she ask not his

name and origin; and him, by her untimely curiosity, she loses. A sentence of Emerson's will afford us a useful hint as to Wagner's meaning in the catastrophe of *Lohengrin*: "The definition of spiritual should be, that which is its own evidence." The divine spirit reveals itself in the soul; it is an inward experience, and can never be known or proven externally. By seeking for external confirmation the soul evinces that it is not yet a fitting vehicle for the spirit; and the latter is necessarily withdrawn, until by a further course of earthly life the soul is sufficiently purified to become one with it.

Of the great Nibelung trilogy, which was begun next to *Lohengrin* in the chronological order, I shall speak the less now, as I have already elsewhere said what I felt impelled to say on this subject. But a few words will be necessary, since our survey of Wagner's works would be too manifestly incomplete without some notice, however brief, of his masterpiece. Wagner is here at his highest, as poet, as musician, and as philosopher. The unusual proportions of the work, of which the performance occupies four evenings, enabled the author to develop his subject — the history of the human soul, to its final redemption and the casting-off of its earthly fetters through the power of love—with a fullness of symbolic detail which the limits of his other dramas did not admit. In regard to the language, it may be noticed that he has here, for once, discarded entirely the ornament of rhyme, and employed a species of alliterative verse, founded upon the alliterative measures common in ancient times to the Teutonic peoples, but treated with far greater freedom and variety. The music throughout is developed from *leit-motive*, in such a way as to form of itself a language of marvellous expressiveness and clearness.

I will venture to adduce one instance from the musical symbolism, not because it is more striking than scores of others, but because its position at the very beginning of the work seems to suggest it as a convenient example where one only is to be chosen. You know that the *Rheingold*, as the prologue to the trilogy is named, opens in darkness, at the bottom of the Rhine. By the flowing waters of the river Wagner has typified the ever-flowing realm of generated life, this sensible universe. Now the music symbolises the creation of the universe, that creation which hath neither beginning nor end, being conterminous with time itself. It begins with a long, low chord, scarcely audible ; a chord composed of the first and fifth notes only of the scale, so that it is neither definitely major nor minor. By this vagueness and obscurity is intimated the nature of Matter, the *prima materia*, which, as philosophers tell us, is the Indefinite itself, that which has no realizable existence apart from form, yet, in itself formless, is the subject or receptacle of every form. From this chord is evolved a flowing and ascending theme, now definitely in the major key ; a theme soft at first and slow, but increasing in strength and swiftness and complexity until it suggests, unmistakeably, the sound of the hurrying waters of some mighty river. The spirit of life is breathing into the void : it is the clothing of matter with form. Presently the music changes into a strain of clear, sweet, melody, and the voices of the nature-spirits are heard, rejoicing in the accomplished work of creation, the abode prepared for humanity to adorn and make glad. And then, when the human soul, as yet unfallen and unseparate, in full communion with the Soul of all, shines forth as the gleaming gold amidst the waters of generated life, the musical phrase which an-

nounces its awakening, begins softly, as if from afar, but, gradually gaining strength, rings out at length, even as a trumpet-call at dawn, to arouse the slumbering world. The flowing theme which here represents the river of generation and the breathing of life into matter, is used again and again in the course of the drama. It is especially associated with the Norns or Fates, the powers which preside over this changeful scene of birth and death. During the prophetic speech of the Vala, in the last scene of the *Rheingold*, it is heard in sad, minor tones ; and the words " a day of doom dawns for the Gods " are accompanied by a reversal, so to speak, of the same theme, descending now instead of ascending, as if to indicate no longer the in-breathing, but the out-breathing, of life, the end of that order of things which was typified by the Gods of Walhall.

*Tristan and Isolde* and Wagner's only comedy, *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, were both written during the progress of the *Nibelung's Ring*. There is a deep, haunting beauty about the words and music of *Tristan* ; a beauty mysterious and remote from our everyday life, yet strangely intimate. The action passes like a dream from which the awakening is to eternal life ; and no more lovely dream was ever imagined by poet or interpreted by musician. In Tristan and Isolde we recognise the soul, inspired by the very breath of love, yet separated from itself by the illusions of earthly existence. It longs for re-union with itself, and finds it at length in that " wonder-realm of night " which encompasses the universe. And note here how naturally Wagner derives his symbolism from the circumstances of his story. In *Tristan*, the day, which keeps the lovers apart, is used as a symbol of the life of this world, with its false shows and empty splendour ; the night, in

which they meet, typifies the spiritual, universal life of the soul, the life of eternity.*

If we found a certain affinity to Wagner's other dramas in the Athenian tragedy, to the *Meistersinger von Nürnberg* we shall find nothing so nearly allied in spirit as the Shakespearean comedy, with its frank joy in life, its mingled humour and pathos. Wagner's comedy is also a pure comedy of human life, but distinctively original and German in character. The scene is laid in the famous old town of Nürnberg, during the first half of the sixteenth century. A charming love-story of Walter, the young poet, and Eva, the wealthy goldsmith's daughter, is associated with the richest and most varied pictures of life in the olden time. In the Guild of Master-singers, with their pedantry and inability to understand the new, inspired art of Walter, Wagner has doubtless hinted at the opponents of his own art-work, who were principally found among musicians and musical critics. The satire, however, is by no means unkindly. And the final triumph of Walter may be taken to prefigure the triumph which was accorded also to Walter's creator, happily before his earthly life was ended. The persons of the drama, numerous as they are, possess that vitality which none but the greatest artists have known how to bestow. Especially is it to be observed how the music, in conjunction with the words, completes the impression, and reveals every character with convincing truth and reality.

Wagner's acquaintance and deep sympathy with the doctrines of Buddhism are evinced both in his prose writings and in his musical dramas—somewhat

* Novalis had used a similar symbolism in his *Hymns to the Night*. "By the word 'Night,' it will be seen, Novalis means much more than the common opposite of Day. 'Light' seems, in these poems, to shadow forth our terrestrial life; 'Night' the primeval and celestial life."—Carlyle's Miscellanies: *Novalis*.

notably, I think, in *Tristan and Isolde.* Among his published writings there exists a sketch for a projected drama on a subject relating to the life of the Buddha ; but the project was never carried out, and his final work, the noble close to an artistic career in which magnificence of endowment and loftiness of purpose had ever gone consistently hand in hand, was the music-drama of *Parsifal*, produced, for the first time, at Bayreuth in the summer of 1882, only a few months before the master's death. The hero, Parsifal, the Percival of the old romances of the Grail, represents the power of purity, which, when by compassion enlightened—*durch Mitleid wissend*—becomes the redeemer of the world. In the double character of Kundry, now the humble handmaiden of the Grail, and again the seductive sorceress and decoy of the Black Magician, we may recognise, I think, that which philosophers have called the irrational soul of man, the animal nature, helpful in its lawful state of service to the higher soul, but fraught with such deadly peril when allowed to rule where it should obey. She, too, is purified in the victory of Parsifal, and when, in the final scene, the glory of the Grail is made manifest, and Kundry sinks lifeless to the ground, the meaning is that in the pure life of the spirit the animal faculties no longer are needed, but are re-absorbed into the source whence they came. In *Parsifal* again, then, we find that the uppermost thought is of that sacred and all-redeeming power of love, which, with such variety of presentation, formed the constant theme of Wagner's artistic productions. It seems as if to this poet the *divinity* of love revealed itself with such ravishing insistence, that he could never cease to sing of it. The theme is surely inexhaustible, and the highest to which an artist could aspire.

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